

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. VITTER. Yes, Madam President, for the reasons I have clearly laid out, I again object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. DORGAN. Madam President, let me again say the reasons that were clearly laid out were inappropriate reasons. The very specific project my colleague described as the problem—at least one of the problems—it turns out he would know, because he has received written notice from the Corps of Engineers, that they do not have the legal authority to do that which he demands.

So I do not know. I do not know where you go from here. If facts do not matter in this place, then I guess we have a fact-free debate and one does what they want to do without regard to the consequences. The consequence in this case—the negative consequence is for a soldier, a patriot who has gone to war for this country is now, in my judgment, being treated unbelievably unfairly by at least one Senator.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

GUN SHOW LOOPHOLE

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Madam President, I rise because today marks 11 years since the massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, CO, occurred. This is a painful recall of a horrible moment in our country that should remind us all of a condition that could easily happen again.

I and millions of other Americans watched in horror as young students hung out of windows in that schoolhouse to try to save their lives, while two of their schoolmates went on a rampage and killed 12 students and a teacher. Those images will forever be burned in our memory.

But here is what a lot of people do not know: All the firearms used by the shooters were bought by an underage friend at a gun show. That purchase was able to be made because of the gun show loophole. Because of the gun show loophole, they were bought with no questions asked, no background check, no questions about who you are, where you might live. The weapons were bought “cash and carry,” without, again, any identifying questions being asked or being supplied. Those 13 people should never have died that day because those teenagers should not have had access to those guns. The young

woman who bought the guns for the shooters said she would not have done it if a background check had been required.

Our laws require a background check for all gun sales by licensed dealers. But a special exemption allows anyone—including terrorists such as bin Laden, criminals, gun traffickers, and the severely mentally ill—to buy guns without a background check from so-called private sellers, who sell hundreds of guns every year at gun shows, fully exempt from any responsibility for those sales.

In 1999, I introduced legislation to close the gun show loophole and to keep guns from falling into the wrong hands. In the aftermath of Columbine, the Senate passed my legislation, with Vice President Al Gore casting the tiebreaking vote. It was a great victory but a short-lived one. The gun lobby stripped my legislation in conference with the House, and in the decade since then we have done absolutely nothing at the national level to close the gun show loophole. No wonder domestic terrorists frequently use gun shows to sell their firearms to fund their illegal activities.

Just yesterday, we commemorated the 15th anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing. It claimed 168 lives, including 19 children under the age of 6. Timothy McVeigh—the killer responsible for those horrific deeds—frequently set up his own booth. He sold weapons at gun shows.

We continue to see the tragic consequences of senseless gun violence fueled by gun show dealers who are not really licensed.

Just a few weeks ago, a few miles from this Chamber, John Patrick Bedell opened fire on two police officers at the Pentagon Metro station. They were wounded before they returned the fire and killed Bedell. One of his semi-automatic guns was linked directly back to a gun show sale. And it is no surprise that his gun was bought outside the normal stream of commerce because Bedell would have failed a background check. He actually tried to buy a gun from a licensed firearms dealer in California, but because of his diagnosed mental illness, he couldn't pass the check.

If that doesn't make it clear that we have to stop guns from falling into the wrong hands, just think of the Virginia Tech shootings. Last Friday, we marked the third anniversary of that horrible day. In that tragedy, a mentally deranged man killed 32 students and faculty in the worst mass shooting in American history.

Whether it is Virginia Tech, the recent shootings at the Pentagon, or Columbine, we are reminded over and over that our gun laws are not strong enough. Yet, while gunshots continue to ring out across this country, the silence from this Chamber is deafening.

I am a veteran. I served in the military in Europe during wartime, World War II, and I understand the desire to

protect one's self and family. But I know how important it is to keep terrorists, convicted criminals, and domestic abusers from having guns.

Some would argue that gun owners are against sensible gun laws, including closing the gun show loophole, but that is simply not true. Recent polling has shown that there is overwhelming support for closing the gun show loophole among gun owners. Here we have a placard that shows that gun owners themselves want the loophole closed. Sixty-nine percent of NRA members agree, and 85 percent of other gun owners agree: Shut down that gun show loophole. Republican pollster Frank Luntz recently found that 69 percent of National Rifle Association members and, as pointed out, 85 percent of other gun owners want us to close this loophole. After all, the vast majority of gun owners are law-abiding Americans who pass background checks and use their firearms responsibly. They know their lives and the lives of their children are in danger when a firearm is purchased by an unqualified buyer at a gun show, by someone who could never pass a background check at a neighborhood gun store. It is as easy as ever for criminals to buy guns—easier, in fact, than it is to get a library card.

We have an opportunity to save lives, and that is why I call on my colleagues to please join me and pass my bill to close the gun show loophole once and for all. Eleven years ago, we lost 12 students and a teacher to gun violence in Littleton, CO. One of the best ways to honor those who perished and those who have suffered is to make sure a tragedy like Columbine never happens again. We owe that and nothing less to the young people who died 11 years ago and the young people who count on us today. We have to step up to our responsibilities and ask all gun dealers to step up to their responsibilities.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT REQUESTS—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mrs. MCCASKILL. Madam President, earlier today I came to the floor to talk about transparency and the bright sunshine of public service and how foundational it is to that service being open. It is impossible to do the people's business if we do not allow the people to see what we are doing.

I remember sound and fury coming from some of my friends on the other side of the aisle when they believed there were decisions being made about the health care bill behind closed doors, sound and fury that somehow someone wasn't telling the public everything that was going on. Meanwhile, dozens and dozens of nominees to do the work of our government have piled up under the heading of a “secret hold.”

I don't really understand how the secret hold came about. I don't really understand why one would ever need a